

## **Hearing Conservation**

Some NASA operations require working in environments where ambient noise levels are capable of damaging the hearing of NASA employees. Some of those operations, such as high pressure air distribution venting are so loud that they have the potential for causing immediate traumatic hearing loss. Many other operations can result in noise induced hearing loss from chronic exposure.

We have become keenly aware of noise induced hearing loss from space crews who experienced continuous noise exposure experienced aboard the Mir Space Station. Although not as visible, every NASA Center has hundreds of employees potentially exposed to harmful noise levels in our earth-based workplaces.

Hearing loss is preventable. I expect full compliance with the NASA noise exposure standard and effective management involvement to assure all elements of the NASA Hearing Conservation Program (HCP) are afforded to the NASA work force.

### **NASA Actions**

#### ***Principal Center***

- Review and revise the NASA Hearing Conservation health standard for submission as a NASA Procedures and Guidelines document. In Progress.

#### ***NASA Centers***

- Center Directors can assure that high noise operations are surveyed and posted .
- Employees with potential exposure to high noise levels must be enrolled in an HCP  
The program includes:
  - Training on where and how high noise levels have the potential for noise induced hearing loss
  - Annual medical surveillance and hearing tests for those potentially exposed to high noise levels
  - Issuance of hearing protection to those with high noise exposure potential
  - Enforcement of hearing protector usage

- Center Directors can assure their center safety medical and health resources are appropriate to provide key hearing conservation program elements
- Center Directors should place added emphasis on "buy quiet" and quiet by design programs.
- Center Directors must ask the questions as to whether designers of new projects and new facilities have adequately evaluated opportunities for engineering controls and conducted the necessary noise hazard analyses.

## **Background**

Every year employees from NASA Centers are identified as having hearing loss that may be linked to their on-the-job noise exposures.

Since 1994 over 100 NASA employees have filed for workers compensation due to hearing loss which occurred while working for NASA. NASA has paid out over \$1 million for those claims.

We know that those costs are only the tip of the iceberg as far as representing the true picture of hearing loss among the NASA work force. Workers compensation costs pale in comparison to the impact felt by each member of the work force suffering with a loss of hearing.